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TAGS: [IZ](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQIS UNDERTAKE SARAFIYA BRIDGE RECONSTRUCTION

Classified By: ITAO Director Mark Tokola for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: On April 12, 2007, suicide bombers detonated a truck laden with explosives while driving over the Sarafiya Bridge. The ensuing blast destroyed the historic bridge, bringing down the main central spans, affecting municipal traffic flow and commerce. As important, the bridge was considered a historic site and symbol of national pride. Baghdad's residents were demoralized by its destruction. But, we have been encouraged to see the GoI independently assuming an active role in pursuit of the bridge's reconstruction. END SUMMARY.

[12](#). (C) Originally constructed by British engineers in the early 20th century, the Sarafiya bridge was initially designed as a railroad crossing. It wasn't until the 1980s that modifications allowed the addition of automobile traffic flow across the Tigris River. After the terrorist attack in April 2007, engineers from the Ministry of Construction and Housing (MoCH) obtained original blue prints from the Iraqi Railroad (IRR) archives. This greatly expedited reconstruction efforts by precluding the need for new architectural designs. Furthermore, GoI officials want the new bridge be constructed in the mold of the old design in order to restore a sense of national pride.

[13](#). (C) In the absence of DPM Zoubai, DPM Salih formed a subcommittee to coordinate the bridge's reconstruction, and the group initially convened April 22. (NOTE: At the time, DPM Zoubai was recuperating in Jordan from injuries sustained during an assassination attempt in March 2007. END NOTE.) Chaired by DPM Salih, attendees included representatives from MoCH, Ministry of Industry and Minerals (MIM), and Ministry of Interior (MoI). The subcommittee agreed MIM would prefabricate steel structures and MoCH would supervise installation. In the meantime, a temporary pontoon bridge is being installed by Iraqi engineers to alleviate traffic congestion and reinvigorate commerce. It was encouragingly evident to us that the GoI had assumed the leading role for the endeavor and considered the bridge a priority in support of Fardh Al Qanoon (FAQ).

[14](#). (C) Preparation work, including embankment backfilling, commenced April 25. Portions of the temporary pontoon bridge began arriving May 10 and expected to be installed by July 1. Meanwhile, the GoI allocated \$23B (ID) to fund the project: \$8B apportioned to MIM and \$15B to MoCH.

[15](#). (C) COMMENT: Despite obstacles, all efforts to date to rebuild the Sarafiya bridge have been autonomously pursued by the GoI without USG assistance. Although the process has been cumbersome, and deadlines for the bridge's reopening undoubtedly will slip, thus far the undertaking has demonstrated increasing GoI capacity to independently pursue emergency reconstruction efforts. The Iraqi government's inter ministerial effort, if successful, may build more than just a bridge. END COMMENT.  
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